



Klamath Network Featured Creature

June 2005

American Pika (*Ochotona princeps*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

This stocky, tailless lagomorph has a Roman nose, rounded ears, and grayish to brownish color. It is much smaller than its rabbit cousins - about the size of a rat (175 mm long). Pikas are preyed upon by eagles, hawks, bears and foxes, its most dangerous foe is the ermine, which is capable of following it into its rocky tunnels.

Behavior:

Diurnal in its habits, the pika appears in early morning and disappears into its grass-lined nest, hidden in rocks, shortly after sunset. Much of its above ground time is spent surveying its domain and sunning itself on lookout rocks. When predators are sighted, pikas emit short squeaks as alarm calls or in attempts to intimidate intruders. Pikas do not hibernate.

Feeding

Pikas are generalist herbivores, eating mainly stems and leafy growth of forbs and shrubs. After the spring breeding season pikas cut, dry, and store vegetation, generally plants with the highest available nutritional value, in "haypiles" beneath overhanging rocks for the winter. They are not entirely dependent on these caches, however, and still occasionally forage for food through snow tunnels during the winter months.



www.acriticaldecision.org/phot
os-banff-page-4/pika-rock.jpg

Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

Pikas generally inhabit talus slopes at higher elevations. Consequently they are found in the higher elevation parks including Crater Lake and Lassen Volcano National Parks. They are also found at Lava Beds National Monument, in the cool, shady crevices of the lava flows.

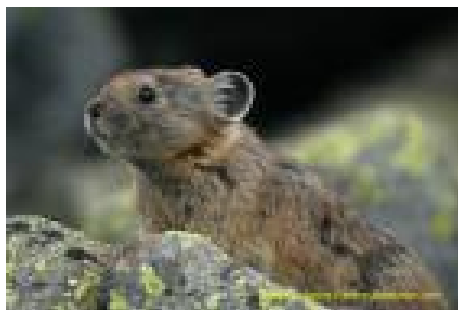


Photo by Alan L. Bauer
www.danbauer.com

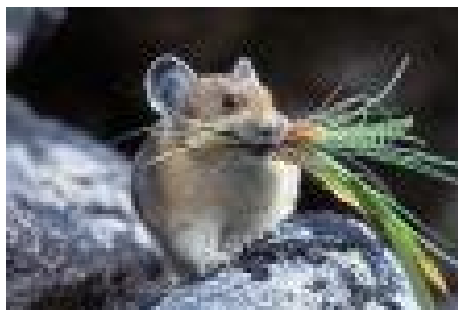


Photo by James Page
www.yellowstonecountry-
adventures.com/images/page-
pika.jpg

Habitat:

The pika usually is associated with talus containing boulders 0.2 - 1.0 meters in diameter and immediately adjacent to meadows with suitable forage plants. Although considered a montane mammal, it has been spotted at elevations as low as 40 meters. It is temperature that plays the most significant role in determining pika habitat. This is because pikas cannot tolerate high temperatures.

Distribution:

Pikas are found in the mountain regions of northern New Mexico and California, northward to British Columbia.

Status

The pika is not federally or locally endangered. However, some parts of the country, such as the Great Basin, are seeing pika populations decline, possibly as a result of warmer global temperatures. Since pikas are dependent upon the cool temperatures often found at the highest elevations, global warming threatens the species by shrinking or eliminating these island-like habitats of cool conditions.